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ABSTRACT

One of 16 units designed for use in an Open University course on the education of handicapped students in the United Kingdom, this booklet analyzes the contribution of research to progress in special education and examines the relationship between empirical knowledge and moral principles in making educational decisions. An introductory section recounts efforts to evade individual responsibility for educational reform by basing educational change on the tenets of history, law, science, efficiency, and psychological development. The next section analyzes six topics in special education research (evaluating a reading scheme, evaluating research support of common theories about incidental learning and structured teaching, determining whether or not schools make a difference, comparing approaches to the history of special education, choosing an approach to remedial education, and examining parents' views of special education) and illustrates a range of approaches to research. Formal research is then considered in a discussion of the effect of research on special educational practice. Questions of research problem selection, research achievements, and research usefulness are addressed. The conclusion emphasizes the value of research in special education and encourages individuals to do their own basic research. (CL)

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The Open University
Educational Studies: A Second Level Course
Special Needs in Education

RESEARCH AND PROGRESS IN SPECIAL EDUCATION

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES

The Open University
Educational Studies: A Second Level Course
E241 Special Needs in Education

Unit 15
Research and progress in special education

Prepared by Tony Booth, Patricia Potts and Will Swann for the Course Team

The Open University Press

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Note on reading

Set reading

The readings for this unit are to be found in:

SWANN, W. (ed.) (1981) *The Practice of Special Education*, Oxford, Basil Blackwell/The Open University Press. They are:

SINHA, C. 'The role of psychological research in special education' (Reading 6.1).

WOOD, D. 'Theory and research in classrooms: lessons from deaf education' (Reading 6.2).

Introduction

1.1 In this unit we examine the contribution that research can make to progress in special education. We emphasized at the start of the course that decisions about education depend as much on our moral principles as on our knowledge of facts (see Unit 1/2, section 5). Here, we explore the relationship between the two.

1.2 We have divided the unit into three main sections. Section 2 reviews the idea of progress in special education and how we assess it. Section 3 examines a number of topics that have been the subject of research studies; these short commentaries are intended to help you to evaluate research and assess its implications. Section 4 looks at the relationship between research and practice, and asks what kind of research is useful and how it might be done.

1.3 Like many activities in which particular groups are employed, research may seem to be a mystifying, complicated enterprise. An important purpose of this unit is to break down the mystique attached to research. We can think of educational research as broadly or narrowly defined. To most practitioners, research has the narrow sense of a professional activity carried on by trained researchers in universities and research centres, involving complicated and difficult research methods. Teachers often draw a line between their day-to-day work and research. They might only think of themselves as engaging in research 'on a small scale' when they do a course involving a thesis or dissertation. Narrowly defined professional research is marked out from everyday activity by its methods, its language, its organization in institutions, salary grades and professional bodies, its means of publication, and, to a limited extent, by its sense of community. In most scientific research, the activities of the researcher have no corresponding everyday version, but much educational research *is* a specialized version of everyday activity. Educators are constantly asking questions about the effectiveness of teaching methods, the impact of new policies, debating the value of involving parents, and so on. At its simplest, research involves asking a question to which you do not know the answer, and then trying to answer it.

1.4 To such everyday activities, the 'researcher' should bring a measure of rigour, scepticism, detachment and independence. But alongside these desirable traits, researchers may also bring some less appropriate baggage: dubious reasoning may be disguised behind spuriously complex methods and language, questions may be asked and studies conducted to satisfy the professional researcher's canon rather than the educator's practical requirements, and the whole enterprise may have the unfortunate effect of enhancing the status of narrowly-defined, professional research at the cost of a loss of confidence of practitioners in their ability to do their own, more basic, research.

1.5 For some time now, there has been a crisis of confidence in educational research, reflected in comments both by the consumers and the producers of research:

> I have to say . . . hat the great thing about research is that a part of it is rubbish and another pa . (I will not be specific about the proportions) leads nowhere and is really indifferent; it is, I am afraid, exceptional to find a piece of research that really hits the nail on the head and tells you pretty clearly what is wrong or what should be done.
>
> (Sir William Pile, former Permanent Secretary to the DES, quoted in Nisbet and Broadfoot, 1980, pp. 1–2).

More surprisingly, the researchers themselves are often equally gloomy: 'If we are to be honest, we may as well begin by admitting that very little of the educational research that is done turns out to have any noticeable impact on the ordinary teacher and his work' (Tony Becher, Professor of Education, Sussex University—see Becher, 1974, p. 41).

1.6 One of the aims of this unit is to encourage you to view the contribution of research in a critical light. In doing so, we have concentrated on the relationship between research findings and their practical implications, and the relationship between the pursuit of research and its social, political and educational context. We have devoted little space to the description of actual research methods, except where they can illuminate

these relationships. If you wish to find out in detail about how professional research in education is conducted, you might look at the OU course DE304: *Research Methods in Education and the Social Sciences* (Open University, 1979).

1.7 Even within formal professional research there is a vast spectrum of studies varying in purpose, method and scope. These range from the huge National Child Development Study which has charted the progress of 11,000 children born in 1958 and resulted in a mound of books and papers, through substantial three- or four-year projects employing two or three full-time researchers—the NFER Integration Study (Hegarty and Pocklington, 1981) is an example—to pieces of work that might take one person a few months and result in one paper. We have selected examples to illustrate key points in evaluating research, not to be representative of the whole field.

1.8 The examples we refer to also reflect our broad definition of the concerns of special education. Providing an appropriate education for disaffected, failing children or children with disabilities involves decisions about such things as streaming and mixed ability teaching, team teaching, timetabling, subject divisions, community participation and the nature of the core curriculum. An examination of the appropriateness of curricula and forms of school organization for children with special needs involves a re-examination of schooling for all children. Now those of you who define yourselves as working 'in special education' will have noticed that articles in specialist journals rarely take this wider view. Special education has been dominated by psychological and clinical perspectives rather than a more broadly educational view.

1.9 It will become clear that we are often critical of the way much research in education has been approached and the manner in which its results have been interpreted. However, we would not wish to denigrate formal research in general. The re-evaluation of research should be a wholly positive and liberating task. If we achieve nothing else by this course we would like to feel that we have prompted you to ask questions. If you are willing to ask and attempt to answer serious questions about policy and practice, then you are all special education researchers.

2 *Progress in special education*

When is change progress?

2.1 In Unit 13, Tony Booth analysed the sources of disaffection and failure in schools. This involved an examination of the way pupils and curricula are controlled by teachers and examination systems, the relationship between school and pupil culture, and the flexibility of responses to the difficulties faced by pupils. He argued that certain changes based on 'a liberal critique of education' might lead to a reduction in failure and disaffection, though he recognized that change in this direction is limited by the economic and political pressures which promote inequality both inside and outside schools. But disaffection might be contained in a different fashion. Schools could become more authoritarian and highly structured, and reduce deviance or rebellion by more effective policing and punishment. Whether or not you advocate either of these directions of change, or can offer another solution entirely, will depend on your view of the world, on the kind of society you want for yourself and others. Whether you regard a change as a reform or regression frequently depends on this world view. This is most obvious for the 'big' educational questions. How should sucess be defined in schools? Should schools select on the basis of abilities or background? How much control should pupils and their families exert over the direction of their education? Should schools encourage democratic participation or should they prepare their pupils to accept an authoritarian world outside? What say should individual teachers have in what they do? What emphasis should be given to skills, crafts and trades in the curriculum?

2.2 Of course most of the changes we make in our lives or our places of work do not involve us in moral turmoil—which may be because the choices themselves have little

moral significance. But our ability to assess whether or not they do have moral significance depends on the moral principles which guide our actions from moment to moment. Usually it is only when it becomes obvious that a course of action conflicts with our beliefs that our moral principles are brought to the surface of our thoughts.

2.3 Quite frequently we fail to notice that there is a conflict between practice and principle because the practice is so familiar that we do not question it; or we may assume that a matter of principle is not involved simply because we have not asked whether it is or not. For example, in reporting on a particular set of special centres for the hearing impaired in ordinary schools, Hegarty and Pocklington (1982) report that: 'The central goal of developing pupils' ability to communicate, preferably in an oral way, is no different from that of deaf education in general' (p. 158). They describe sign language as a last resort for 'the small minority who have failed to make any noticeable progress in acquiring oral language' (p. 159). In the same study these authors refer to 'the general agreement in the world of deaf education that having profoundly deaf pupils alongside the partially hearing makes for difficulties'. I suspect that many deaf people would take strong exception to the devaluation of themselves and their language which is implied by these remarks.

2.4 Our evaluation of practice, then, depends on our principles. Progress can be defined as change that conforms to our moral values. Our ability to assess progress or the need for it depends on the extent to which we have articulated our principles. Mary Warnock has suggested that intelligent action depends on both an imagination of future possibilities and an understanding of the present (Warnock, 1978). But before we can act intelligently we also need to know whether the action is in accordance with our principles.

Can we escape the moral imperative?

2.5 Perhaps there are ways in which we can make up our minds about educational change which don't require this awesome individual responsibility. Certainly there have been plenty of people who have encouraged us to believe that this is possible; that reform can be defined without recourse to our values. There have been attempts to sacrifice personal responsibility on the altars of history, law, science, efficiency and psychological development, by claiming that it is these, rather than ourselves, that can provide the reasons for our actions. We shall argue that all such efforts obscure the ordinary human values which underlie the choices we make.

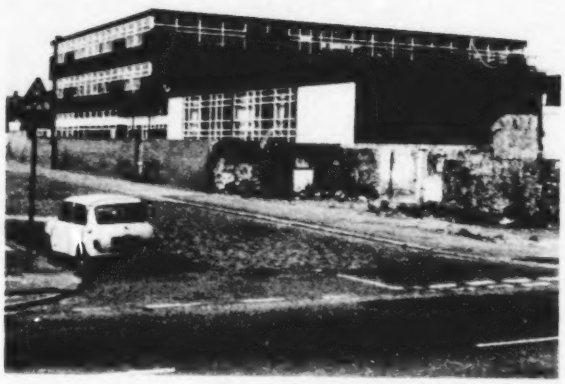
The god of history

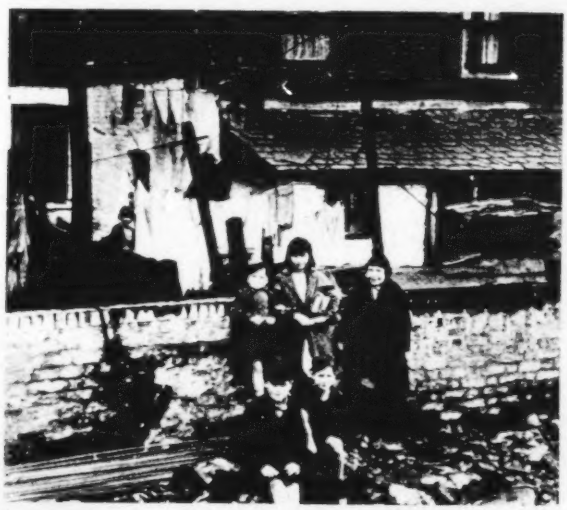
2.6 In *Education and the Handicapped, 1760–1960*, Pritchard (1963) documents the succession of stages in the education of handicapped children—from 'earliest provision', through the periods of 'experiment', 'transition', 'state intervention' and 'growth', up to the present period of 'consolidation'. In reading his account it seems that progress has been guaranteed by the benevolence of history; that the system that we have now must be good because it was produced by an advance in human civilization:

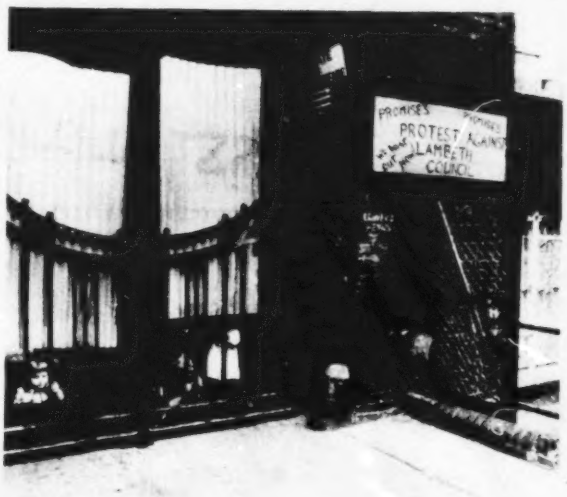
> Progress there has been; progress from that day in 1760 when Thomas Braidwood first used his spatula-like instrument, to a day two hundred years later, when the Department of Education of the Deaf at Manchester advertised for a research fellow with qualifications in physics or electrical engineering. Progress there must yet be; progress in overcoming the problems that still exist in every aspect of the field of special education. As in the past, so in the future will voluntary effort and voluntary organizations play their part. As in the past, so in the future will they often lead the way. To be opened in 1962 is the first special school for maladjusted children with communication difficulties. It will be established by a voluntary body.
>
> (Prichard, 1963, p. 221)

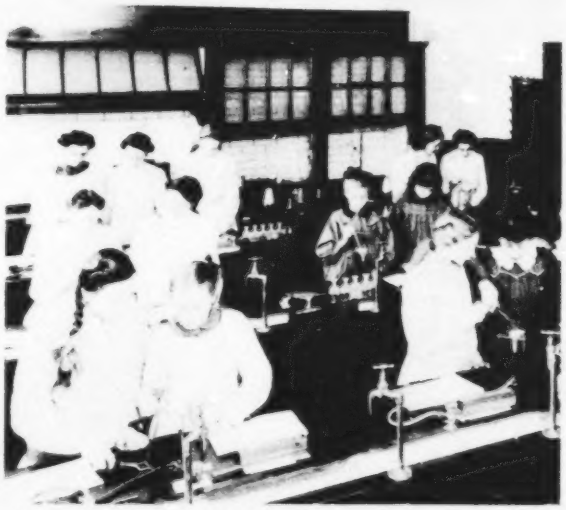
But as Patricia Potts in Unit 8 demonstrated, more recent developments cannot always be portrayed as better than what came before. Current practice is a mixture of improvements and regressions.

How much progress, how much change?









2.7 The view that history involves an inevitable march of progress has been called 'historicism'. The idea that the passage of time can guarantee progress is linked to a view that human affairs are subject to laws of evolution. But such a view involves a misapplication of biological ideas. In biology, forms of life which developed later are not to be regarded as biologically superior to their antecedents; they are merely adapted to new environmental pressures. Yet because some people have felt that humans are spiritually superior to 'lower' animals they have believed that biological change automatically moves in a direction of moral gain. A notion then that society is governed by evolutionary pressures, has been taken to imply that change means progress.

2.8 But it is not only in history books that we find the historicist approach. How many times have you heard people argue that something should be done because 'that is the way things are going'? We have computers in our classrooms and word processors in our offices because of the inevitability of the technological revolution. We keep more detailed records and teach by objectives because schools will have to become more accountable. We include handicapped children in our schools because integration is coming. But if those are the reasons for our change, what happens when we are informed that there is a new horizon?

The god of law

2.9 We are all good citizens and good citizens obey the law, therefore we all obey the law. But there are good laws and bad laws. During the early days of writing this course, discussions in special education have been overshadowed by the emergence of new legislation. Administrators have argued that they awaited the 1981 Act before they could begin to define their plans, and then after its publication they awaited government direction on how the law should be interpreted. Yet many of the same administrators have had long experience of working with British educational legislation and its effects on LEA policy. Such laws are rarely directive in detail, and most educational decisions lie outside the scope of the law. In such circumstances an overvaluation of the relevance of the law may serve to hide the real reason for a course of action or for its failure. For example, integration may not be implemented because 'the law gave no resources to do it' or integration may be advocated because 'it's the law of the land'; but these are often just excuses or justifications for actions determined upon other grounds.

The god of science

> There is much talk about various political objectives, such as the improvement of education, the elimination of social classes, and the creation of communities in which human equality is achieved to a much greater extent than is true of our present societies. There are also objections to these arguments, in terms of necessary loss of liberty, or the incompatibility of equality with human nature. Proponents and objectors usually base their arguments on preconceived ideas; both postulate the kind of human nature which suits their purpose. In this book I have asked the simple question—what does science have to say on the subject? . . . Can it be that the class structure of modern society is essentially a function of the innately differing intellectual and other qualities of the people making up these classes? Is the status which a person enjoys in society, as a function of his profession, determined by the same innate qualities?
>
> (Eysenck, 1973, pp. 11 and 19)

2.10 You will recognize the false line of reasoning in the above quotation. Even if it could be shown that the differences in people's abilities were preordained at conception, this could not account for the way we categorize them or the value we place on them. The argument is back to front. It is because of a preoccupation of people in our society with distinctions in ability and status, that some people attempt to account for such differences or prop up their own account with science. The attempt to reduce questions of value to matters of scientific fact is part of a system of thought described in Unit 1/2 as 'positivism'. It began as an attempt to devise a rational system for the development of society and gained credence from a belief in natural social evolution. It depends on a view of society which stresses consensus rather than conflict within it. For in a society which accepts that conflicting views can be held it becomes harder to eliminate such differences by appeals to science.

The god of efficiency

2.11 A common move within writings in education involves the hidden assumption of a value which is so widely held that the conclusions about action to which it contributes appear to emerge directly from the facts. We all want children to learn in schools, so the classrooms in which they learn more must have been better. We want them to behave well and pass their exams, so the best schools are those with high examination pass rates and no disturbance. Conversely, we may rule out liberal education or integration because they do not 'work' but lead to inefficient education. As may be clear from the examples given later in this unit as well as those in Unit 1/2, such issues can seldom be resolved by experimental investigation and are often founded on irrational hypotheses. Of course there are limits to the effective approaches we can take in education. It would be extremely difficult to teach French using a language laboratory programmed in German, though we would not need an elaborate experiment to tell us that (though we have come close to such an approach in teaching profoundly deaf children through the medium of spoken English, or many other children through a cultural system which is unfamiliar or alien). But within broad limits we can actually make a whole variety of approaches work. Which methods we can apply successfully depends, in part, on whether we *want* the approach to succeed.

The god of development

2.12 Kohlberg and Mayer (1974) have been the advocates of a particular view of education in which 'development' is seen as its central aim. Good education is what produces a more developed individual and poor education restricts development. They relate their ideas to those of John Dewey, who had argued for a system of education based on ethical and psychological principles: 'only psychology and ethics can take education out of the rule of thumb stage and elevate the school to a vital, effective institution in the greatest of all constructions—the building of a free and powerful character' (Dewey and McLellan, 1895, reprinted 1964, p. 207). And to be fair to Kohlberg and Mayer, they do talk of 'value neutrality' as a 'Fallacy'. Yet in transmitting theory into practice, they perform a neat logical twist. For Kohlberg and Mayer, the application of *psychology* to education involves elucidating the stages of cognitive and moral development. The application of *ethics* merely involves taking the view that we should actually strive to achieve through education what is psychologically more advanced. The trick lies in attempting to define a notion of moral or psychological development which is itself independent of values. As soon as we examine what people actually do or learn, the moral worth of their actions or education becomes clear. For most of us it is the morality of someone's *actions* rather than their attaining some level of moral reasoning which would determine their moral status. Thus before we can be interested in how well schools teach, we have to ask what they teach. If we don't do that we may find ourselves in the position of the woman who wanted to make two complaints about a meal: the food was disgusting, and the portions were ridiculously small.

2.13 There is another version of the view that development should be the aim of education to which Kohlberg does not adhere. Education, it is argued, should provide the conditions for the natural growth of children who can be trusted to emerge into self-regulating democratic individuals if left without adult interference. On this view a teacher becomes a 'gardener' providing the conditions for effective growth. One trouble with this notion is that it is virtually identical to a free market view of human affairs, which values the production of those individuals who survive the harshness of unfettered competition. The kind of individual who would emerge from such conditions would depend on the nature we ascribe to the child. But there is no way of restarting education with children untarnished by the culture which surrounds them. Nor can we escape from the responsibility for an outcome to education which we have produced by our own active intervention.

2.14 The belief that there is a 'motor' within people which will propel them towards personal growth if only obstructions can be removed, informs a surprising amount of educational thinking. It has been systematized in the humanistic psychology developed in the USA, and now underlies much of the thinking about education in the UK. Research projects frequently make the assumption that knowledge will lead to positive, progressive change. But how knowledge is used will always depend on the values and power of the people who use it.

Integrating handicapped children into ordinary schools can enhance provision for all, study says

Many handicapped children now in special schools could be educated just as well in ordinary schools. This is one of the conclusions of a Government-funded study on educating children with special education needs in mainstream schools.

But the authors warn that the difficulties and drawbacks of integration should not be minimized, "since that would be to sacrifice pupils' educational well-being on the altar of principle". However, as long as some pupils go to special schools when their contemporaries with similar needs have as good an education in ordinary schools, there are grounds for disquiet, they say.

The study, *Educating Pupils with Special Needs in the Ordinary School*, by Seamus Hegarty, Keith Pocklington and Dorothy Lucas, is the result of a three-year research project by the National Foundation for Educational Research, sponsored by the Department of Education.

Integration of the handicapped, far from damaging the ordinary school in any way, can add to its educational strength and enhance the provision made for all pupils.

TES, 11.12.81

Sir, – I would like to comment on some aspects of your report on the NFER research into special needs for pupils in the ordinary school (December 11). Until recently I taught as a deputy head teacher in a junior school which was operating a system of integrating children with learning difficulties before the Warnock committee was convened.

One of the main purposes of intergration is to improve the social acceptance of the special needs pupil by the rest of his peer group. To this end the attitudes of the teachers and the head teacher are crucial. Yet if given a chance the majority of teachers would choose not to integrate such pupils ...

The chief stumbling block affecting teacher attitudes does not lie in a lack of knowledge about handicap conditions but in the nature of monetary rewards and the work loads allocated to the staff.

K. HEGARTY,

TES, 8.1.82

Getting beyond the slogan

"Integration," as the Warnock Report noted, has become "the central contemporary issue in special education" – an observation as true internationally as in this country. Integration is also an extremely emotional word and, as the authors of another report published this week (page 8) warn, "something of a slogan word ... a good deal of advocacy has gone on without the benefit of clear thinking or good reasons"...

At the one extreme we therefore have single-minded protagonists, whose convictions may be rooted in social and political aspirations as much as first-hand knowledge, calling for the right to total integration with no holds barred. If it can be done in Sweden or the US, they may cry, why not here? And at the other end of the spectrum there are the equally instinctive doubters, asserting equally strongly that an integration policy is out of the question in their school/l.e.a. because there is no money to do anything about the stairs.

Neither side is wholly right or wrong.

TES, 11.12.81

Sir, – K. Hegarty (January 8) is absolutely right to stress the importance of teacher attitudes when considering the integration of pupils with special needs...

Many teachers *are* opposed to integration and would not choose to have pupils with special needs in their classes. One of the most striking findings however of the NFER study reported recently was that this did not apply to teachers *who had had experience of integration programmes*. Teachers in schools which ran integration programmes were asked if they felt it was appropriate for handicapped pupils to be placed at their school: there was near-unanimous agreement that it was appropriate;

SEAMUS HEGARTY,

TES, 22.1.82

Nutrition: Help for mentally retarded

By the Staff *of Nature*

A team that has carried out a short exploratory study of the effects of carefully chosen nutritional supplements on mentally retarded children has reported an encouraging improvement in IQ. While the team cannot draw general conclusions from their results, they hope that more work will be done to explore the possibility of extending such treatment.

The Times, 20.2.81

Half Britain's children aged 16 play truant, survey shows

By Tim Devlin
Education Correspondent

About half the children aged 16 in Britain play truant some time during the school year, and at least a twelfth do so often, according to a study published yesterday by the National Children's Bureau.

The study of 15,000 children, nearly all those born during one week in March 1958, is the most comprehensive survey of the life-style and attitudes of that age group ever undertaken in Britain, and is part of the bureau's continuing National Child Development Study, which has already reported fully on the children when they were aged seven and 11.

Further discouraging findings from the study are that more than a quarter of 16-year-olds never, or hardly ever, read a book on their own, many still live in poor conditions in houses without inside lavatories and hot water and many have to share a bed with another member of the family.

However, it appears from the survey that few are involved in crime, or emerge from school totally illiterate or innumerate.

The Times, 13.9.76

Schools for scandal?

The radical notion that most 16-year-olds might be nice, ordinary people who like their parents, plan to get a good wage-earning job, marry and have two' children, tolerate some aspects of school, smoke and drink in moderation, now has the official seal of research approval. The National Children's Bureau's famous longitudinal study has proved it ...

Given the general tenor of the findings, it has been hard for the most dedicated scandal-seekers to make much of them. They have done their best with the figure that 52 per cent had stayed away from school during the course of the year.

TES, 17.9.76

Class counts more

A handicapped child does not make a family more anxious. That is the surprising conclusion of a study among 87 mothers of children attending a special school in Aberdeen.

TES Scotland, 20.6.86

Parents are blamed for impaired speech

By Diana Geddes
Education Correspondent

Children from all types of social background often start school with impaired speech because their parents fail to talk enough to them, according to a report published today. Parents are also criticized for failing to teach good table manners.

The Times, 2.2.80

Home best, says top child expert

RESEARCH is costing doubts on the belief that nursery schools are vital for the intellectual development of small children and particularly for those from working-class families, writes Mark Jackson of the Times Educational Supplement.

Dr Barbara Tizard, Britain's leading child psychologist, who is leading the research by London University Institute of Education, told a conference at Southampton last week that studies are showing that most children, including those from very impoverished families learned what they needed at home.

The Sunday Times, 13.1.80

FAMILY CARE

Jonathan Croall looks at research which suggests day nurseries produce aggressive children who later fail at school.

TES, 22.4.83

No cause for high-rise anxiety

Living in high-rise blocks does not significantly affect children's health or school performance, says a new report.

But when a mother is unhappy and dissatisfied with the flat, it adds, the children do less well at school. If a mother is "fairly satisfied" with her high rise home, her children's reading age is fractionally – 0.3 of a year – above the general level.

If a mother is "very dissatisfied" the average reading age is 0.2 below.

TES, 20.11.81.

3 *Evaluating special education research*

3.1 In this section we discuss six areas of research concerned with the education of children with special needs. Our aim is to help you to understand what goes on when people do research and to assess the value of research findings. We decided against generalized descriptions of the main approaches to research—experiments, surveys, observational studies, action research—because there are no universal prescriptions about how to do research. Methods have to be appropriate to the questions one wishes to answer. The examples we have chosen represent a wide range of approaches to research:

(a) *Evaluating a reading scheme* describes a typical use of experimental method in education.

(b) *Incidental learning and structured teaching* looks at a common assumption about children with learning difficulties which is generally thought to have a basis in research. We ask whether the research allows us to hold this belief.

(c) *What do parents want?* is about research on parents' views of special education. It shows the dangers of drawing conclusions based on a 'one-off' study, and the limits of generalizations about parents.

(d) *What is a good school?* examines a well known study about whether or not schools make a difference. It shows the way values can be hidden among what purport to be value-free scientific procedures and results.

(e) *Doing history* compares two approaches to the history of special education and shows how very different accounts can result, depending on the questions one asks.

(f) *Choosing an approach to remedial education* completes the section by looking at an account of the remedial education policy in Grampian which arrives at very different conclusions from Unit 14. How can two accounts differ so much?

None of these examples is intended to be representative of the best (or worst) that research has to offer. We have used them as a vehicle for making a number of points about the way methods shape the character and value of research, and about the relationship between researchers' own views and their work.

Evaluating a reading scheme

3.2 Ann Lewis, the deputy head of an ESN(M) school, carried out a piece of research (Lewis, 1982) which won a United Kingdom Reading Association Research Award. She was interested in studying the effectiveness of a reading scheme for adolescent slow learners called the Corrective Reading Programme (CRP).

3.3 This scheme was introduced into the remedial department of a comprehensive school. To study its effects she selected twenty-one 11-year-olds who made up most of the remedial reading group in one year. They all had reading ages below 9½. She divided them at random into three groups of seven. Group 1 was to be taught using the Corrective Reading Programme; Group 2 was to be taught using another scheme new to the school, The English Colour Code; and Group 3 was taught using the school's existing programmes and materials. All three groups were given a number of reading tests before they began their work and were retested on the same tests after six and fifteen months. Her aim, then, was to measure and compare the effects of the three reading programmes on the gains children made on these tests. She repeated the study in the following year with a further twenty-four children.

Causes and effects

3.4 What is the logic behind this design? Ann Lewis wanted to know if the CRP is a significant improvement over existing practice, so she had to compare them. This accounts for her Groups 1 and 3. But she also recognized that the very fact of introducing a new scheme can have its attractions and may influence how well the children learn, so she gave her Group 2 another programme which hadn't been used in the school before. Her experimental design makes a number of assumptions about what affects learning to

read, but unfortunately she never states these explicitly in the paper. For the moment let's test out the set of assumptions that appear to underlie the experiment. She recognizes three factors that can affect learning to read: a general exposure to reading teaching, specific experience of being taught with the CRP, and the novelty of a programme. We can write these as a kind of equation:

> Learning to read = general exposure to reading teaching + specific exposure to CRP teaching + the novelty of the method used

The aim of the experiment is to measure the effects of the second factor. She tries to measure the effects of it with her three groups, so that:

> What Group 3 learns = general exposure to reading teaching
>
> What Group 2 learns = general exposure to reading teaching + the novelty of a method
>
> What Group 1 learns = general exposure to reading teaching + specific exposure to CRP teaching + the novelty of the method

All this can be arranged so that:

> The effects of CRP teaching = what Group 1 learns minus what Group 2 learns

3.5 Every experiment has a model of causes and effects like this underlying it. The first thing to do in assessing the value of an experiment is to understand these assumptions and assess their validity. According to our summary of the assumptions of this experiment, the experiment presents some problems:

1 Is there anything real corresponding to the effects of general exposure to reading teaching? There might be, but this experiment doesn't measure it. All it measures is the effects of one school's usual remedial reading programme. So the experiment can only tell us about the relative success of CRP compared with this school's normal programme, not the general superiority of CRP over all or even most other programmes. No general statements can be made about the efficacy of CRP compared with all other schemes.

2 Does the experiment measure the effects of novelty? No. The only way this would be possible would be if novelty were the *only* difference between the programmes for Groups 2 and 3. In other words the two groups would have to have the same programme of teaching and be equally familiar with it, but to Group 2 it should be novel and to Group 3, not. This, of course, is impossible.

3 Is Ann Lewis really suggesting that these three factors (general exposure to reading teaching, the scheme in use, and the novelty of the scheme) are all that matters in learning to read? Surely the quality of the teacher is vital. In her experiment the three groups were taught by different teachers, so what they learnt could be due to this rather than to the teaching programmes. But it isn't just the teacher, but the room, whether the group is large or small, social background of the children, teacher–pupil relationships (perhaps Group 1 children might have got on better with Group 2's teacher), and so on.

3.6 So, as an attempt to measure the effectiveness of the new reading programme Ann Lewis is interested in, her experiment is limited. But consider what kind of experiment could tell us something about the *general* effectiveness of a teaching method. We would have to isolate the effects of the programme from the effects of schools, teachers, children, resources, family background . . . The variability is immense, and the experiment would be unmanageable. Then, of course, we would have to compare the results with the average effect of a large number of other methods, all of which would have to be taught in just as many matched schools, by just as many teachers, etc. And so this little study becomes an undertaking of galactic proportions, *if the aim is scientific generalization.*

3.7 Ann Lewis's experiment is an example of a general problem. In education, there are so many variables that affect the way a child learns, and most of them cannot be brought under control. Now of course no experiment in any sphere could bring every variable under control. The solution to this problem is to make sure that anything not under control will operate in a random fashion, so that if the experiment is done on a big

enough scale things will cancel each other out. In Ann Lewis's experiment, the factors she does not control—the school and teachers, for example—do not operate randomly. They are likely to have a systematic effect on what happens. This is true of many if not most educational experiments. So, experiments like Lewis's tell us only about a very limited set of circumstances. In this sense they are closer to case studies than they might appear.

3.8 In fact, Ann Lewis's published paper is an abridged version of her M.Ed thesis in which some of these limitations are discussed; yet they are not mentioned in the paper itself. In a personal communication she recognizes some of the limitations. Unfortunately, few readers of journal articles take the trouble to get hold of the background source, and when many articles are summarized in one review of the literature the limitations on the results are easily glossed over.

Measurements and concepts

3.9 A central feature of experiments is the *operational definition of concepts*. In Ann Lewis's experiment, 'ability to read' is defined as scores on a number of reading tests. Ability to read is not something that can be directly observed—it is an abstraction, in the same way that intelligence and happiness are. There is much room for disagreement about how you would recognize an intelligent or a happy person, or how you would recognize a good reader: is it someone who can read silently very fast, or someone who can explain T. S. Eliot's poetry? In order to do statistical analysis, an inalienable part of most experiments in education, the concepts Ann Lewis is interested in have to be pinned down to scores on tests of reading accuracy and comprehension, and spelling. The main test she used was the Neale Analysis of Reading. She also studied the kind of mistakes children made in oral reading and dictation. The Neale Analysis consists of a number of passages to be read aloud. Children are scored for the number of mistakes they make in reading the passages, and their comprehension is tested by asking them questions about it. There are some important problems in doing this:

1 If the aim is to represent as accurately as possible what the children learnt, then is this the best way to go about it? Alternatives might include keeping records for each child of what new words could be read, whether their interest in books had increased, and so on.

2 The view the experiment gives us of the differences between the children is somewhat limited. By giving them all the same set of tests it tells us how they differ on a common property. But is there any good reason to assume that the common properties tested are more important than the untested differences? Is it of no importance that Sue reads adventure stories and writes poems, whereas Frank likes comics but hates reading them to his teacher?

3 These methods of measuring the essence of what it is to be able to read are limited. They concentrate on mechanical skills, but they tell us little about how much the children understand of what they read, whether they have been stimulated to read more, whether they have developed an interest in reading outside school, etc. Many of these things are either very difficult to measure or take a lot more time to measure than does a simple reading test. Thus, the logistics of the experiment may take precedence over what matters educationally. Instead of concentrating on reading research reports of experiments, it might be that a more fruitful strategy for teachers would be to discuss among themselves what matters in reading, what counts as good reading.

3.10 The demands of scientific experimentation exert their own limits on the ways in which educational innovations can be assessed. To the extent that researchers write reports for each other, then this is not a major worry. But most educational researchers want their work to have some practical impact. Thus the restrictions of experiments can become the restrictions of practice.

Incidental learning and structured teaching

3.11 Some ideas that begin their lives in the minds of a few academics rapidly become common currency for a variety of reasons, even though they may have little conceptual or empirical support. One idea that has become common currency amongst those involved

in teaching children with learning difficulties is the idea of a deficit in incidental or spontaneous learning. Peter Mittler (1979) tells us that 'mentally handicapped people are often less competent than others in learning incidentally'. Cave and Maddison (1978) reviewed research for the Warnock Committee and on this basis told them of 'the *inability* of subnormal children to learn spontaneously'.

3.12 This belief is especially important because it is used to justify the use of a particular approach to educating children with learning difficulties. One of the publications of the British Institute for Mental Handicap has this to say on the subject: 'Research findings support a structured approach. Evidence from a number of sources indicates that the mentally handicapped do not learn spontaneously from a stimulating environment. An enrichment approach, therefore, is unlikely to be effective' (Crawford, 1980, p. 11). The Warnock Committee was also told by Cave and Maddison that the inability to learn spontaneously was one of 'the reasons which make reliance upon "exposure" methods inadequate to foster the development of [mentally handicapped children's] language abilities'.

3.13 But what does it mean to say that mentally handicapped children do not learn spontaneously, or incidentally? 'Spontaneous' is defined in the *Shorter Oxford Dictionary* as 'Arising, proceeding or acting entirely from natural impulse; without any external stimulus or constraint'. In the first sense, to say that the mentally handicapped do not learn spontaneously is simply to say in another way that they are mentally handicapped; in the second sense, 'spontaneous learning' is a contradiction, since all learning involves an external stimulus, by definition.

3.14 We can go through the same exercise with the term 'incidental learning'. If something happens incidentally, it happens as an 'aside' to whatever is the main activity. For example, whilst searching the newspaper for a bicycle to buy, you learn, incidentally, that someone is advertising cheap shoes. But the odd thing about saying 'mentally handicapped people do not learn incidentally', is that the sentence is incomplete. Incidentally *to what?* Could it really be that, irrespective of what they are doing, they are generally bad at picking up anything incidentally?

3.15 The 'incidental learning deficit' theory was first advanced in research literature in 1964 by an American psychologist, Ray Denny. To test the idea, Denny proposed comparing 'retardates' with normal children in a particular sort of experiment. The subjects are given a task to complete, and while they are engrossed something else happens, such as a number of people walking through the room dressed in various colours. Afterwards, the subjects are shown photographs of a number of people and have to say which of these people they saw. The number of people correctly recalled is the measure of incidental learning. Denny reports a number of experiments which established that mentally retarded children score lower at this kind of task than normal children.

3.16 These experiments do show that the mentally retarded children did not learn the incidental material very well. But this does not mean that they show that these children have an incidental learning deficit. An equally attractive explanation is that mentally handicapped children are only able to deal with a limited amount of information at a time, and the task they were given consumed most of their attention and left them little 'spare capacity' to notice anything else. On this argument, the amount of incidental learning they do depends crucially on the demands of the task they are given, how interested they are in it, and also perhaps on how striking the incidental material is. This argument lends no support to the idea that there is a *general* incidental learning deficit.

3.17 It is also worth noting that the incidental learning deficit theory sits uneasily alongside other common ideas about the mentally handicapped. Cave and Maddison (1978) also said in their research review that: '*distractibility* and over-activity are characteristics of many subnormal children'. If children are easily distracted from a task, it suggests that incidental learning will be more, not less, likely.

3.18 In linking the incidental learning deficit theory to the need for structured teaching, we have some more problems to face. The essence of structured teaching is that the tasks given to children are clearly defined and what children are to learn is specified in advance.

The kind of experiments I described earlier tell us about children's ability to learn something incidental to a set task, but this is not the same as learning from doing something that is not a set task. The connection between the research and its application may be less clear than at first appears.

3.19 To some readers all this may seem academic overindulgence, because what is actually meant by incidental learning deficit is quite obvious: mentally handicapped people don't learn from experience in the way everyone else does. Of course this is true, but then we scarcely need research to tell us so. What *isn't* at all obvious is that we should, *therefore*, adopt a particular kind of teaching method for the mentally handicapped, but that is another story (see Swann, 1983).

What do parents want?

3.20 Parents are the objects of a great deal of research, and some of this was discussed in Unit 3. Here we shall look at two issues. The first concerns parental attitudes to the school placement of their children; the second concerns research on parental involvement in education.

Parents and school placement

3.21 Any group of parents of handicapped children is likely to contain some who defend special schools and some who advocate integration. In E241 you have read more of the views of the latter group than the former. You may even have felt that parents who like their children to go to a special school have not been given a fair hearing. Researchers have declared for both sides.

3.22 As part of an evaluation of a scheme to integrate a group of children with a variety of handicaps from a special school into a comprehensive school, one of us interviewed the parents of the children to find out what they thought about the scheme (Ince, Johnstone and Swann, 1983). It soon became apparent that attitudes are not fixed quantities but change with time and the tide of events—a simple enough conclusion, but one that is easily over looked by research.

3.23 As well as asking parents what they thought about the integration scheme, they were also asked about their children's educational history and what they had felt at each stage. It was found that their attitudes at any one time depended very closely on what had been happening to their child's education. By choosing the moment to ask, the same question about attitudes to special schools or integration could have produced vastly different responses. This is illustrated by the experiences of one set of parents, Mr and Mrs Shifnal, whose son Peter has a mild form of cerebral palsy and who, in his primary years, had learning difficulties.

3.24 There was doubt among LEA professionals as to whether Peter should go to an ordinary school when he reached five. The head of the local first school, however, was keen to have Peter and willing to make the necessary adaptations at the school, and at that stage Peter's parents too favoured ordinary school placement for him. But by the time of his last year at first school, Peter's parents were less satisfied: 'They were trying to push him and so he was getting more and more ill-tempered generally and frustrated . . . it was a matter of some teachers were more sympathetic than others . . . they just didn't accept he had a learning problem'.

3.25 At this stage, the Shifnals actively sought a special school place for Peter, and requested an assessment. When he was placed in a special school, Mrs Shifnal's first feelings were of guilt and concern that Peter was being removed from normal life, but Mr Shifnal felt a 'relief that at last something was really being done'. Very quickly, they both came to feel very positive towards the special school: 'It was the first time an authority took us, as well as Peter, into the whole consideration of what was happening. We felt that we were being cared for as much as Peter was'.

3.26 Yet after some time, the Shifnals began to worry that the special school might be limiting Peter, and they described him as becoming bored: 'We were beginning to think "Peter is showing signs of over-protection", being in a sheltered environment'.

3.27 At around this time, the special school mooted the possibility that Peter and a group of other children might transfer to a comprehensive, with a support teacher. Mr and Mrs Shifnal recalled mainly their fears about how Peter would cope in a large and complex organization where heavy demands might be made of him, but they agreed to the transfer because they trusted the judgement of the special school staff.

3.28 It took very little time for the Shifnals to become extremely positive in their attitudes towards integration. They noticed the good effect on Peter's school work, the wider curriculum that was available, and the way being in an ordinary school had helped him fit into his local community. Their experiences had caused them to reflect more deeply on the principles they would wish to see underlying special education:

> I am sure the money that is spent on special schools they could give ordinary schools the help they needed with severely handicapped children. I am sure this is the important thing that all children mix together right from the start . . . It would obviously undermine the sort of ratio of effort available to teach the bright children and I think probably that's the reason why there would be objections to it . . . But for the good of the community at large I think it's desirable.

3.29 The story these parents tell shows that parents' attitudes towards school placement depend on the experience they have had. Attitudes change, depending on the way experience changes. Simply to ask a group of parents what their attitudes towards school placement are will not give an informative answer, unless the experience on which their views are based is also understood. A snapshot in time can be very misleading.

Parental involvement

> We have insisted throughout this report that the successful education of children with special educational needs is dependent upon the full involvement of their parents: indeed, unless the parents are seen as equal partners in the educational process the purpose of our report will be frustrated.
> (DES, 1978, The Warnock Report, para. 9.1)

3.30 There is a great deal of emphasis in all fields of special education, but especially in the area of mental handicap, on parental involvement. In Unit 3 we described some of the efforts that have been made to involve parents. The movement produced a great deal of activity, in which researchers, usually psychologists, established parent workshops or parent training programmes and evaluated their effects. The results were usually extremely positive: parents welcomed what was being done and found it useful (Cunningham and Jeffree, 1975). The assumption behind this research is that parental involvement in education means parents sharing the work of teaching their child, often using the goals, materials and methods selected by professionals.

3.31 Until recently, little or no research had been done on other aspects of parental involvement: How are parents involved in placement decisions? What influence do and can parents have on what happens to their child at school? Do parents get the kind of education they want for their children? More research of this kind has been carried out recently, some of which is presented as case studies for this course (see Booth and Statham, 1982). People who have asked parents how they feel about their involvement in placement decisions (e.g. Tomlinson, 1981; Welton, Wedell and Vorhaus, 1982) have found a general dissatisfaction.

3.32 Welton, Wedell and Vorhaus (1982) attribute the lack of consultation with parents to the professionals' unwillingness to upset parents, especially if they themselves are unsure about a child's problem or the most appropriate way of dealing with it. These researchers found, not surprisingly, that parents were quite aware of the difficulty and were only made more anxious by the professionals' reticence. They would prefer to share the uncertainties than be excluded from any referral process, an exclusion that sometimes went as far as not telling parents until 'arrangements had already been made for their child to go to another school'. And even after placement in a special school, parents often received very little information about their child's progress: 'parents who were worried about their children's limited progress (or less) at special schools, sometimes had great difficulty in obtaining an opportunity to discuss their concern' (p. 25).

3.33 These findings would seem to require changes in policy to ensure greater parental involvement. The 1981 Act does go some way towards achieving this. But Welton *et al.*

do not mention the difference between appeal committees for ordinary school choice under the 1980 Act, and appeal committees for placement of children with special needs under the 1981 Act which favours parents of non-handicapped children (see Unit 3, para. 3.15).

3.34 Some people have argued that the emphasis, in practice and research, on parental involvement in teaching, has had the effect, if not the intention, of deflecting attention from the unequal power relations between parents and professionals (Potts, 1983). This inequality has been a theme of E241. We may confidently expect that in future there will be more research on parental involvement at this more political level, looking in detail at the power of parents to affect educational decision-making and to control what happens in special education.

3.35 But this research too will carry its own assumptions about parents, what they want and what they are like. In the USA these trends in policy and research arrived earlier, and the extent of parental involvement that was built into Public Law 94–142 in 1975 far exceeds that built into the 1981 Education Act. American parents were expected to act as advocates to ensure their children's rights to an appropriate education, to be active participants in decision-making about placement and programmes of education, and to be active collaborative educators of their children. These policies were recently reviewed by Ann and Rutherford Turnbull (1982), who are American professionals involved in special education and themselves the parents of a handicapped child. The burden of their message is that some parents don't actually *want* to be involved in their child's education to this extent, and many don't have the time, knowledge or power to exercise these roles effectively. Nor, they conclude, can it be assumed that in all cases the interests of parents and children coincide, and parents have a right to have their own interests taken into consideration. The Turnbulls quote a number of parents whose feelings contradict some basic assumptions on which research and policy have been devised. One upper-middle-class mother had been heavily involved in an early intervention programme:

> A lot of times I get tired of having a role-God. I don't want to solve that—I'm paying you to take him for three hours and, lady, make it work! Maybe that's a nasty attitude toward teachers but I kind of feel that way sometimes. It's not worth it to me if I have to figure it out—I might as well have him with me at those times.
>
> (Winton and Turnbull, 1981, p. 15)

3.36 Another mother had been acting as an advocate for her child, but had now stopped:

> When (our son) was first born we really got involved, and it was tremendously beneficial. But now I just want to draw back . . . When you're putting in so much time that your family is no longer benefitting from it, then it's time to quit and let somebody else do it.
>
> (Winton and Turnbull, 1981, p. 17)

3.37 Research and policies which fail to respect the diversity of parents' wishes and circumstances are certain to cause problems. In reading and applying research on parental involvement, it is important to understand the values and assumptions that underlie it and to relate these to one's own circumstances. Technical research, concerned with implementing a policy, always needs to be balanced by research which questions the appropriateness of policy goals.

What is a good school?

3.38 In 1979 widespread publicity was given to a report written by Michael Rutter and his associates called *Fifteen Thousand Hours* (Rutter *et al.*, 1979), a title which referred to the hours spent by a pupil in compulsory education. The book was widely viewed as helping to tell us what secondary schools should do in order to improve attendance and behaviour, increase the rates of public examination success and reduce delinquency; these were the 'outcome' measures of the study. The team followed the progress of 2,000 pupils in twelve secondary schools in Inner London and compared the development of the pupils in school with the characteristics they had displayed when they arrived. The study employed quantitative methods and subjected its results to

How good schools can change children

This week, Professor Michael Rutter of London University publishes a research document called Fifteen Thousand Hours which tells the real truth about comprehensive schools. RICK ROGERS reports.

New Statesman, 23.3.79

Second thoughts on the Rutter ethos

When *Fifteen Thousand Hours*, the book of the research of Professor Michael Rutter and his team, was published last year, it was widely acclaimed as justifying many practices of local authorities and schools. It seemed to give the lie to the suggestion that schools could do nothing about low intelligence or poor social backgrounds.

But since its publication the research has run into a barrage of complaints and criticisms that has led some to question whether any reliance can be placed on the Rutter findings.

Slowly emerging from the research journals is a catalogue of technical and philosophical objections. Some are serious and some nit-picking, and some are so vituperous as to verge on the libellous. Strung, it seems at times by the publicity given to *Fifteen Thousand Hours* and the questionable conclusions drawn from it by others more than by the shortcomings in the work itself, some have called into question the motives of the researchers in attacks that have even brought serious critics of the research to its defence.

TES, 13.6.80

More thoughts on the Rutter ethos

Sir,—Bob Doe's excellent piece "Second Thoughts on the Rutter Ethos" (June 13) provided hope at long last. Could it finally be becoming clear, even to education researchers, that the school itself is not the main determinant of urban school success or failure? My book *The Changing Urban School* published during *The Times* printing dispute last year and not yet reviewed in *The TES*, demonstrated at length how London schools over two decades tried and failed to compensate for society. Far more important than teachers and educational researchers ever imagined, I showed, had been the effects of external social policy on those limping giants, our major cities and their schools.

R. E. THORNBURY,

TES, 4.7.80

Sir, — Only an idiot or an educational statistician could suppose that there are no differences in quality between schools which produce differences in outcomes, academic and behavioural

The disbelief of statisticians has merely emphasized the inadequacy of their own measures not that differences do not exist.

Teachers know that different homes produce great differences from the same social class, neighbourhood, religious or any other grouping. Parents know that schools providing for similar populations or neighbourhoods are different.

B. HARGREAVES,

TES, 4.7.80

Rutter sampling was 'faulty'

Failures and inadequacies in the Rutter report, *Fifteen Thousand Hours*, published last year after research in 12 secondary schools and purporting to show the differences made by the internal organization of a school, were admitted by a member of the research team, Dr Peter Mortimore,

TES, 1.8.80

numerous statistical analyses. Janet Ouston, one of the contributors, summarized the main findings and set out the implications of the research for teachers, educational psychologists and other professional groups. She argued that the research supported a view that 'Even after statistical allowances have been made for differences in measured ability and family background at the end of primary schooling, secondary schools still vary considerably in their examination pass-rates, in delinquency-rates, in rates of attendance and in patterns of behaviour at school' (Ouston, 1981, p. 60). Having established that schools did make a difference to the progress and behaviour of pupils, the researchers went on to define the characteristics of schools which contributed to success. They suggested that these characteristics clustered together to form the atmosphere, culture or, as they called it, the 'ethos' of the school:

> We found that the more successful schools were likely to emphasise the academic side of school life, to praise and encourage pupils' good work and to maintain the pupils' direct involvement in lessons. These schools also provided a better physical environment for their pupils and encouraged them both to participate in school activities and to take responsibility at school. The successful schools combined higher expectations of academic success with appreciation of pupils' achievements, whilst providing a pleasant and supportive environment.
> (Ouston, 1981, p. 61)

3.39 The authors of the original report laid stress on the achievement of a consensus in the school which would allow this 'ethos' to develop:

> The 'atmosphere' of any particular school will be greatly influenced by the degree to which it functions as a coherent whole, with agreed ways of doing things which are consistent throughout the school and which have the general support of all staff . . . The particular rules which are set and the specific disciplinary techniques which are used are probably much less important than the establishment of some principles and guidelines which are both clearly recognisable and accepted by the school as a whole.
> (Rutter *et al.*, 1979, p. 192)

3.40 Now some people have argued that the findings of the study are questionable, others that they are trivial (see Tizard *et al.*, 1980). The authors pre-emptively responded to the second of these criticisms by pointing to certain features of schools which, in spite of all that common sense might indicate, were not found to be associated with bad outcomes. Schools on split sites, with worse teacher–pupil ratios, with poor teacher continuity and less severe disciplinary regimes were not 'less successful' than those without these features. This finding was based on a comparison between 12 schools, only four of which were on split sites. On reading the conclusions of the report one LEA chief adviser suggested: 'LEA's might reflect that, at times, they may have been in pursuit of a chimera in past efforts to resource beyond a certain minimum level consistent with health, safety and the basic needs of the curriculum' (Allen, 1980, pp. 25–6). Some might therefore add that the findings were also positively dangerous!

3.41 The concerns of the book are part of an academic debate which has been taking place over the last twenty years about whether or not the attainment of pupils is under the control of teachers (Coleman *et al.*, 1966; Jencks *et al.*, 1972). This debate itself has two major strands; the first is concerned with the effect schools can have in reducing disparities in attainment between social classes (see Unit 14), and the second with whether schooling can alter the overall level of achievement of all pupils. The Rutter research was primarily directed to answering this latter question: 'Do a child's experiences at school have any effect; does it matter which school he goes to?' (Rutter *et al.*, 1979). This could be called a 'researcher's question', and may seem to border on the irrational to people involved in day to day practice. Could the authors be suggesting that the teaching of either French or German makes no difference to the level of attainment in foreign languages or to the particular language that a pupil acquires? Or are they saying that it is plausible to suggest that two schools, both of which have French departments, will always be equally effective in teaching French irrespective of the characteristics of the teachers in them? Moreover, Rutter and his associates chose to conduct their study in a way that stacked the chance of finding positive results against themselves.

3.42 The research team looked at 12 schools in the Inner London Education Authority, where considerable selective education still operated in the seventies. The

schools were chosen to be broadly similar. Whilst this eased some aspects of the research task—the schools were similarly resourced and the children came from a similar cultural background—it actually minimized the likelihood that differences would be found. One would expect there to be the biggest differences between schools of widely different nature. One might select two groups of schools which on the face of it differed considerably in the educational opportunities they offered children, and then see whether these differences could be explained by factors outside the school. That such an elaborate piece of research should have created such a difficult test of one of the central hypotheses is quite puzzling. The fact that they nevertheless found some differences in the effects of different schools (even though these differences have subsequently been questioned by other researchers) may be a tribute to the researchers' machismo but it contributes relatively little to debates about practice.

3.43 There are other ways in which the researchers made life unnecessarily difficult for themselves. The Rutter study examined schools in a tough poor area of London with considerable inner city stresses. As schools are currently constituted, it is likely that they make the greatest impact on children whose home backgrounds and values are congruent with the values of the school. In looking at the differences between schools, the study ignored the factors which affect the course of individual pupils' lives within one school. One might, for example, expect a particular pupil to fare badly if she had a succession of bad teachers in several subjects who left the school mid-year, particularly if her family did not have the time, capacity, inclination or money to compensate for her poor school background. Such teacher effects may be averaged out when the results for total school populations are compared, and so would not show up in the Rutter statistics.

3.44 The second set of questions occupying the minds of the research team can be termed 'practitioners' questions'. These are about ways to improve practice. But were the methods of the study appropriate to such a task? If you want to improve the practice of a school, what do you have to decide, what kinds of information do you need? The Rutter team never studied the curricula of the schools and so their practical recommendations necessarily concentrated on management style and public relations. But teachers within schools have to be concerned with the content of lessons. What would be your list of the characteristics of a 'good' school in a multiracial area? How would these relate to the critique of schools elaborated in Unit 13?

3.45 The fact is that there can be no universally agreed set of outcomes for schooling which are independent of social values and political beliefs. What weight would you give to 'preparing pupils for democratic participation'? Could a school be a good school if attendance encouraged membership of the National Front or the Socialist Workers Party? Could a single-sex grammar school be a good school? Should schools contribute to a reduction in sexism? The Rutter team claimed that they had made an 'attempt to be objective and not allowed our personal views and values to colour our view of the data'. Yet they selected a set of measures of the outcome of education which suggest that a narrow concept of academic and behavioural efficiency is the criterion by which schooling should be judged.

Doing history

3.46 In this sub-section we shall contrast two approaches to the history of provision for people with special needs, concentrating on material either included or frequently referred to in E241. We look first at what the authors of the passages cited say about their aims, and second at the kind of evaluative comments they make about their findings.

3.47 The first approach provides a cumulative account of expanding provision, which explicitly or implicitly approves of the concurrent developments in voluntary initiatives, specialization and professionalization. The assumptions are that a more elaborate system is a better one, and that the story of the past hundred years or so is a story of progress. D. G. Pritchard's book *Education and the Handicapped* (1963) and Chapter 2 of the Warnock Report (DES, 1978) are examples of this approach.

3.48 The second approach rejects the assumption that the growth of a system of special education can automatically be equated with a steady improvement, and asks questions

about the past which yield interpretations quite different from those found in Pritchard or Warnock. Examples of this approach are Joanna Ryan and Frank Thomas' book *The Politics of Mental Handicap* (1980), an extract from which appears as Reading 2.1, and Irene Bowman's article on 'Maladjustment: a history of the category' (Reading 2.3). These authors look to the past in a search for the sources of current issues, for example the interests served by labelling children in certain ways, and for the origins of myths about the homogeneity of people with Down's Syndrome. They are more inclined than Pritchard is to point out that public rhetoric does not always match reality. Instead of heroes and progress, the interpretations of a century of special educational provision offered by this second group of writers are more likely to introduce notions of social control, repression, prejudice, and the fragility and inconsistency of the changes that occurred.

3.49 Between Pritchard and Ryan and Thomas lies a gap of seventeen years, and there have been many changes in practice in education, social sciences and mental health care in that time. The Warnock Report's history resembles that in Pritchard much more than the attitudes espoused by Ryan and Thomas, and historians who are highly critical, or indeed those disposed to see progress in the movement of events, have never been limited to one period of time.

3.50 Pritchard sees his narrative as 'The story of the advance in opinion and outlook from 1760 to 1960, which brought about the change from instruction to education, from institution to school, and from mentally defective to educationally sub-normal'. The resonant conclusion to the book has already been quoted earlier in this unit (para. 2.6). But in his conclusion he does not mention that when he wrote, in the early sixties, a large group of children with severe learning difficulties was still excluded from education, although he does mention it earlier in the book. He does not question whether the label 'sub-normal' is really an advance on 'defective'. His book is the result of extremely thorough research and its scope is broad. Prolonged controversies, such as the best methods for teaching blind or deaf children, whether or not mentally defective children should be placed in life-long custodial care, or how to persuade the government to fund provisions for economically unproductive people, are discussed in vivid detail. He is also clearly concerned that children with special needs are recognized and provided for. Nevertheless, criticisms are gentle. The chapter headings are organized in such a way as to represent a neat progression, a straightforward and unified movement from 'experiment' to 'transition' to 'state intervention' to 'growth' to 'consolidation', imposing a simplicity on the story that does not convince.

3.51 The first part of Chapter 2 of the Warnock Report relies heavily on Pritchard's book, which is still one of the few accessible general studies. Again, the tone is uplifting:

> There followed in time the intervention of government, first to support voluntary effort and make good deficiencies through state provision, and finally to create a national framework in which public and voluntary agencies could act in partnership to see that all children, whatever their disability, received a suitable education. The framework reached its present form only in this decade.
>
> (DES, 1978, para. 2.1)

3.52 The Warnock Committee describe their report as being 'pre-eminently about the quality of special education', which, they say, depends upon the 'skill and insight' of those people who 'work together in the interests of children' (DES, 1978, para. 2.85).

3.53 In contrast to this focus on professional activity, Joanna Ryan sees her task as tracing the changing definitions and concepts of mental handicap in relation to practices—containment, treatment, education. She aims to give a voice to people who have had no history, who have been seen as an anonymous and threatening group, and for whom the provision of special institutions did not necessarily seem to make their lives better:

> Mentally handicapped people are still as hidden from history as they are from the rest of life. What history they do have is not so much theirs as the history of others acting either on their behalf, or against them . . .
>
> The changing definitions of difference constitute the history of mentally handicapped people. These definitions have always been conceived of by others,

never are they the expression of a group of people finding their own identity, their own history. The assertion of difference between people is seldom neutral; it almost always implies some kind of social distance or distinction. The differences between mentally handicapped people and others have mostly been seen negatively, making them a problem to themselves and to others. Only in a few instances has the 'otherness' of mentally handicapped people been valued positively or respected.

(Ryan and Thomas, 1980, pp. 85 and 13)

3.54 This is uncomfortable reading; we are inevitably implicated in the processes Joanna Ryan describes. The continuity between past and present precludes any self-congratulations, and sets an inescapably social and political context for her book.

3.55 Joanna Ryan sets out to peel back the layers covering our perceptions of the difference between 'us' and mentally handicapped people, and so to trace the sources of their stigmatization. As far as she is concerned, adherence to an official–professional approach enables us to avoid questions of prejudice and segregation and so remain uninvolved in what we are writing about:

> Contemporary science—biology, medicine, psychology—does not explicitly concern itself with how mentally handicapped people can strain our sense of what is human . . . Professional training ensures that doctors, nurses and teachers need not ask these questions either. But the absence of such questions from the professional and scientific literature does not mean they have ceased to be important. They live on in the despair of parents . . . They emerge as burning issues in the lives of mentally handicapped people, in their struggles to gain some self-respect and independence.
>
> (Ryan and Thomas, 1980, p. 116)

3.56 The two different approaches to history that we have briefly described thus derive from the concerns and interests of the contemporary authors. This means that the development of special education is seen either as a story of humanitarian progress, with more and more children identified as handicapped in some way, or as the story of the social categorization of dependent groups which serves the interests of the professionals rather than the users of special services. In looking at research in this area, it is therefore illuminating to read material presented by authors whose aims are significantly different.

Choosing an approach to remedial education

3.57 The policy initiative in remedial education in the Grampian region of Scotland is described in detail in Unit 14 section 4, as were a range of reactions to the changes. You may recall that the policy changes were made in response to criticisms of remedial work based on the teaching of basic skills in remedial classes or groups and also as an attempt to minimize the way inappropriate curricula made difficulties for children. A whole-school approach to learning difficulties was to be attempted, by introducing team teaching and curriculum consultancy into the range of services offered by remedial specialists. The changes were not based in any direct sense on research results, nor were they introduced as an experiment to be discarded at the first sign of failure. They were planned as part of a long term strategy for altering the way schools in the region responded to the needs of their pupils.

3.58 Unit 14 section 4 refers to an article which appeared in *Remedial Education* (Ferguson and Adams, 1982). This reported on part of an evaluation of remedial education in the Grampian region, carried out by researchers from Aberdeen University in 1980. The article documents the reactions of class teachers, remedial specialists and pupils to team teaching, using a prepared questionnaire. It concentrates on the answers to three questions:

1 How do remedial teachers describe what they do when they are working with a subject specialist?

2 What part do remedial teachers play in the planning of courses and the preparation of lessons?

> 3 How satisfied are remedial teachers and class teachers with the remedial teacher's contribution to team teaching sessions?
>
> (Ferguson and Adams, 1982, p. 24)

3.59 The investigators went into six schools and interviewed 41 remedial teachers, 48 class teachers and 54 pupils. On average, the remedial teachers spent rather more of their teaching time on team teaching than withdrawal work, though the latter still took up a very significant part of their time. The subjects involved in team teaching included English, home economics, maths, history, geography, science, religious education, technical subjects and modern languages. The authors report that, despite the fact that almost all the remedial teachers did some preparation for subject lessons, only five out of forty-one prepared lessons jointly with subject specialists. A majority of class teachers felt that the preparation of their remedial colleagues was inadequate, and almost half of the remedial teachers agreed with this assessment. Only eight remedial teachers and eight class teachers felt that team teaching was a more effective strategy for helping pupils with learning difficulties than withdrawal from their classroom, whereas about double that number in each case felt that pupils benefitted more by withdrawal. All in all, the report provides a rather bleak evaluation of the progress of the policy changes. This is lightened only by the finding that the pupils felt positively about having adults helping them in the classroom:

> The general picture which emerges of the remedial teachers in the classroom is one of passive acceptance and contentment with an undemanding role. Most accept that it is the class teacher's responsibility to undertake the planning and preparation of lessons and courses and the class teachers, in turn, jealously guard their right to maintain control of the progress of each lesson.
>
> (Ferguson and Adams, 1982, p. 27)

3.60 In a discussion of their findings, the authors suggest that disappointment with the results of traditional remedial teaching could lead to more than one approach. They draw attention to the predominant method in the USA:

> In the United States individualised reading had come to mean diagnostic and prescriptive reading instruction based on the pre- and post-testing of reading objectives and the provision of 'instructional sequences' selected or devised to fit individual needs. The reasons for choosing highly systematic, individualised approaches seem well founded. They are derived from work (see Brennan, 1979) on the characteristics of slow learning children whose incidential learning, it is claimed, is poor.
>
> (Ferguson and Adams, 1982, p. 28)

3.61 It is clear from this passage which approach the authors of the article favour, drawing attention to the *incidental learning deficit* and favouring *diagnostic–prescriptive teaching*. They do not describe the evidence for these leanings and both these concepts have been challenged (see above and Unit 5/6, section 4). They suggest that we take it on trust that:

> Remedial pupils seem to learn more effectively when difficult tasks are broken into gradients of small steps presented one at a time with frequent checks on progress and plenty of opportunities for repetition and practice. Team teaching may not be capable of creating a situation in which these needs can be met.
>
> (Ferguson and Adams, 1982, pp. 28–9)

3.62 Ferguson and Adams reintroduce in these two passages a clinical perspective on learning difficulties based on 'the characteristics of slow learning children' and the thesis that remedial pupils require a single teaching style. The Grampian initiatives are an attempt to recognize the interacting effects of pupils, teachers and curricula in the production of learning difficulties. In Jane Mercer's terms, as described in Unit 13, they involve a 'social system perspective'. Whether or not you find Ferguson and Adams' alternative attractive will depend in part on what you think of the clinical approach to pupils' difficulties.

3.63 We should also examine the appropriateness of the questions the authors of the article sought to answer. They wanted to see how examining the reactions to a team-teaching role for remedial teachers might contribute to discussions about whether to substitute team teaching for traditional remedial education. But the policy changes had

a much wider purpose than this. They were aimed at a re-examination of the school curriculum using remedial specialists as change agents in both a *consultancy* and a *team-teaching* role. Their success might be better assessed by the extent to which schools were adapting their curricula rather than by examining whether the remedial staff had positive attitudes to teamwork.

3.64 But the Aberdeen University evaluation represents only one of a number of strategies for illuminating policy changes. It attempted to provide a snapshot of the changes at a particular point in time. Now as the examination of parental attitudes to integration described above made clear, the picture you get depends on when you take your snapshot. Several people in the Grampian region feel that the evaluation was conducted at such an early stage that the researchers were tapping the initial discomfort felt by teachers faced with changes in their accepted and accustomed roles.

3.65 'Action research' provides a very different approach to policy evaluation. It can be divided into two broad strands. One form starts with a policy commitment on the part of a researcher and then the evaluation is used as a means to further that policy. The second strand can be called 'democratic evaluation' and involves researchers helping groups of people to define the changes they wish to make and then to implement them. This second approach pictures researchers as having no views of their own, or alternatively being willing to help pursue changes which may conflict with their own beliefs. In the Grampian case, where the policy is being centrally administered by the region, any action research could only be of the first type. The central questions would be: What problems arise in attempting to implement the new policy? How can they be overcome?

3.66 In action research a conscious attempt is made to contribute to the changes which are being assessed. Now the Aberdeen University team might argue that they did not make a conscious attempt to intervene in the policies; but there can be little doubt that a research team, particularly one based in the same place as the changes they seek to evaluate, will affect the policies on which they report. As people read the reports and talk to the researchers, they may be confirmed or modified in their views. A reading of Ferguson and Adam's article provides some evidence for the view that the authors *are* involved in an action research project, and one on a totally different policy from the one adopted by Grampian. They seem to be asking: how can we introduce teaching by objectives for children with learning difficulties in Grampian schools?

3.67 Teaching by objectives, as well as the approaches to remedial education developed in Grampian, have to be understood as parts of wider educational philosophies about the nature of schooling and the learning process. Different educational philosophies sustain different ways of life, and choices between ways of living are rarely settled by research. How one reacts to the difficulties which arise as an inevitable consequence of change depends on one's assumptions. If change is desired then one asks: how can the difficulties be resolved? If the change is deplored then snags are seen as evidence of policy failure.

4 *Research and practice*

4.1 In this section, we shall try to understand what effect research has had on special educational practice. In doing so, we shall focus on narrowly defined, formal research. In general the impact of this research has been slight. This is in marked contrast to many other fields of practice, such as medicine and engineering, where research has a very direct impact. New understandings of the human body, new investigations of therapies, end up as changes in clinical practice. In education, research and practice are not nearly so closely related. Why not, and what could be done to bring them closer together?

4.2 The following two readings offer an analysis of the problems and one kind of solution in special education. We shall use the comments to raise some of the important issues, which we will then pick up by asking four questions: How are research problems chosen? What does research achieve? What research is useful? and Who should do research?

Reading Now re-read the first part of 'The role of psychological research in special education' by Chris Sinha (Reading 6.1 in the Reader). You have already studied this reading in Unit 12, and this time you need only read up to the end of the section on theoretical and practical reasoning on p. 412.

Comment (a) Sinha is concerned only with psychological research, but this does constitute much of the research in special education.

(b) He writes that the rise of the research industry gave rise to the problems of disseminating and implementing the research findings. Those who worry about these problems are usually the *sponsors* of the research and the *researchers* themselves. The *customers* tend to take a different view. Those who pay for and do research may have some cause for worry if no-one shows any great interest in what they do. The belief that the solution is better dissemination rests on the assumption that, once disseminated, the customers will see the relevance of the findings. There are reasons to question this belief. Many people have the idea that we need to solve the problem of getting research implemented, but this is a muddled idea for we cannot implement a fact or an explanation. We can only implement a plan.

(c) Sinha describes the 'commonsense' view that pure research works out the answers to fundamental problems and applied research puts these solutions to work in solving practical problems. He criticizes this view on a number of counts. His most important criticism is that the problems 'pure' researchers choose to tackle are affected by social and educational beliefs, practices and problems. Pure research on intelligence testing, for example, grew out of the problems of mass education in the late nineteenth century (see section 6 of Unit 9, and section 2 of Unit 12). If mass education had been differently organized, it is quite possible that little or none of this would have happened. Fundamental problems in special education are chosen, not discovered. And the problems researchers regard as fundamental do not always coincide with the problems of day-to-day practice.

(d) Chris Sinha hopes to break down the barriers that divide researchers and teachers, but at the same time he leaves some of these barriers undisturbed. He still has researchers and practitioners in separate institutions under different terms and conditions, and with different goals in life and different interests. Is it important to maintain this separation, or should it be reduced?

(e) Teachers and researchers have different interests. Thus in the teacher research group the researchers had done their work and wanted to apply it, while the teachers faced the problem of teaching a particular group of children and were looking for enlightenment. If teachers' problems don't call for the kind of knowledge the researchers have on offer, what should happen? How far should the research on offer dictate the problems the teachers try to solve?

(f) The teacher research group ended up by conducting a number of experiments. Sinha doesn't make it clear what kind of experiments these were or whether they helped the teachers to do their job better. Practitioners often get involved in research in the process of gaining higher qualifications, and they become subject to the same pressures researchers are subject to. Research can be a way out of, not a way deeper into, education.

(g) Sinha describes the teachers' knowledge as specific to individual children and contexts, and procedural. It is 'how-to' knowledge about specifics. A lot of what teachers (and all of us) know, never gets put into words. In operating from day to day in classrooms, teachers develop routines, and it can be very difficult to describe these routines and what they are for. Sinha thinks one job of research is to help teachers articulate what they are doing so they can be more informed in deciding what they should do. How articulate are you about your job?

Reading Now read 'Theory and research in classrooms: lessons from deaf education' by David Wood (Reading 6.2 in the Reader).

Comment (a) In commenting on Sinha's article, we pointed to the researcher's idea of an average individual. David Wood describes another major problem in trying to make useful general statements about children—that what they do depends on the situation they are put in, and one can gain a false impression of their abilities from observing them away

from their everyday world. A lot of the early compensatory education programmes were built on serious misconceptions about the verbal abilities of working class, especially black, children. Psychologists had concluded that many of these children were almost non-verbal, on the basis of interviews with the children. So, the argument went, they needed to be taught the language almost from scratch. The result was teaching programmes such as Distar Language (Bereiter and Engelmann, 1966). However, William Labov (1970) showed conclusively that, far from being non-verbal, these children were clamming up to cope with a very threatening situation.

(b) But it isn't sufficient to leave the testing room for the classroom, if the aim is to produce practically useful understanding of children and their education. In Reading 6.2, Wood points out that the way classrooms are described has generally been in the control of the researcher. How you describe something depends on what you want to do with it. A description involves recording some details and ignoring others, and two descriptions of the same event or place can look completely different, just as a road map of England looks nothing like a geological map: they contain different details and serve different purposes. Finding your way about with a geological map is not recommended. Similarly, a lot of descriptions of classrooms by researchers have been almost unrecognizable by people in the school, and not useful to teachers because they don't embody the teachers' own view of the classroom. To provide useful information, the researcher has to understand the teacher's views and goals.

(c) Putting this into practice takes time. David Wood and his colleagues spent a year informally developing an understanding of the classrooms of hearing impaired children. This amount of effort is extremely unusual, not least because of the shortage of research funds. Would it be a better general strategy for teachers who already share a common set of ideas, assumptions and ways of talking to do the research?

(d) The story of collaboration with Margaret Tate is a good example of Sinha's redefinition of the job of research (point (b) above). It requires researchers to listen sympathetically to teachers and value their insights. The researchers gained from the teacher's knowledge, but they also helped her to make her 'procedural' knowledge explicit. Later the teacher began to dictate what problems to study.

(e) In working with Jean Lees, David Wood and his colleagues managed to begin with one case study and then show how similar results could be achieved with other teachers and children. By working in this way, they were also able to identify important exceptions. Generalization was the *last* stage of the research. And again, simply studying her own activity helped the teacher to improve her work.

How are research problems chosen?

4.3 What you find out depends on the questions you ask. People who do research are subject to many influences which shape the questions they try to answer and the way they do their work.

4.4 In a period when learning difficulty has been viewed as an individual failing, there has been a great deal of research on the psychological characteristics of children classified as ESN, or mentally retarded, or whatever label is current. This work has concluded that these children have poor memory, concentration, etc. Far less research has been devoted to investigating the detail of how children come to be excluded from ordinary curricula and schools. Answers to the questions 'What's wrong with children who fail at school?' and 'What happens to make children fail at school?' are likely to be very different, and to have different policy implications. The former leads to treatment of individuals, and the latter to treatment of schools and teachers (see Unit 13, section 4, and Unit 14, section 4).

4.5 There is, of course, a limit to the control of research by the prevailing climate of opinion. New ideas do emerge or are encouraged, often from a young researcher doing a PhD. Elizabeth Anderson's first book, *The Disabled Schoolchild: a study of integration in primary schools* (1973), was based on her PhD thesis and explored and publicized a way of educating children with distinctly un-conservative implications. Researchers with convictions about practice often work alone on a small scale and sometimes have an enormous impact, in the way Maureen Oswin's work on children in subnormality hospitals did during the 1970s (Oswin, 1971; 1978).

4.6 The few people who do educational research for a living are subject to the powerful influence of sponsors, of which the most important in Britain is the DES. Sir James Hamilton, Permanent Secretary to the DES, told the annual meeting of the NFER in 1982: 'I hope no-one here believes that we owe educational research a living. Increasingly, as financial constraints become more and more severe, the market will become less tolerant towards research which is at best indifferent in value' (*Times Educational Supplement*, 20 October 1982). 'Market forces' affect both the questions asked and the quality of the work done. Two trends have tended to give the DES a much tighter rein on research today than it used to have. First, the Schools Council, which used to sponsor a great deal of research and development, has been abolished. Its money came from the DES, but it decided how to spend it. It has been replaced by two new bodies, one on examinations and the other on the curriculum, but neither will have the autonomy the Schools Council had. When the Council was closed down, amongst the projects begun but not completed were one on disruptive pupils and one on gifted pupils, both within the same programme of work. Only the latter project survived the axe. The Social Science Research Council, which also gets its money from the DES and allocates it independently, has also suffered major financial cutbacks and reorganization. Second, the way in which research projects are initiated has changed a great deal. Until the early 1970s, research sponsors tended to wait until researchers came to ask them for funds. In 1972, the DES took its first major initiative by calling for research on nursery education, to coincide with its projected expansion of nursery places. Today the DES only funds research in fields which it has itself chosen. Its programme in special education lays down in detail what topics it wants explored. In addition, cutbacks in universities and colleges have left less money for research funded by individual institutions, and this has made research even more dependent on direct government support.

4.7 Other powerful influences on people who do research are the career pressures of academic life. Those lucky enough to have tenured posts (virtually none of them are full-time researchers) still depend for status and promotion on research publications. These must be in refereed academic journals, so researchers must write their papers in an appropriately academic language and do their work so that it fits the accepted canons of research. Overall, this still tends to favour 'hard' research which involves experiments and statistics, but the continuing proliferation of research journals makes variety more possible. Full-time researchers, on the other hand, are nearly all employed on short term contracts with no guarantee of future employment: their insecurity does not encourage them to take risks.

4.8 In general, then, 'big' sponsored research will tend to fit in with current policies and not to come to any radical conclusions. But the very vagueness and diversity of British educational policy leaves opportunities for innovative work. It is scarcely in tune with the policies of many LEAs that 'special educational needs can be met in the ordinary school and to a far greater extent than is currently the practice', or that 'there are many pupils in special schools at the moment who could be educated satisfactorily in ordinary schools'. Yet those are the central conclusions reached by a major study funded by the DES (Hegarty and Pocklington, 1981). We can now look at what the fate of these conclusions, and others, might be.

What does research achieve?

4.9 It has been said that the relationship of policy-makers to research is like that of a drunk to a lamppost: they seek support, not illumination. It is very uncommon, if not unknown, for an educational research project on its own to result in an immediate change of policy. More often, those who seek to promote a particular policy will look for justification from science. One of the very few pieces of educational research to hit the headlines was Neville Bennett's work on *Teaching Styles and Pupil Progress* (Bennett, 1976). This work was generally taken as showing that children fared better in the 3 Rs in primary classrooms where traditional, formal teaching methods were used, as opposed to progressive informal methods. Since 1976, a lot of criticisms have been levelled at the research, both for its oversimplified classification of teaching styles and for the methods used in the study (see Unit 15 of E200: Open University, 1981; and Gray and Satterly, 1976). Bennett himself has now revised his views (Aitkin, Bennett and Hesketh,

1981). Unlike the original study, which came out in a blaze of publicity, these arguments had nothing like the same circulation. Bennett's original research was much cited by the writers of the *Black Papers* (e.g. Cox and Boyson, 1977) who favoured a formal, selective education system. Gabriel Chanan shows how one of these writers made use of Bennett's research:

> As soon as the report appeared, Stuart Froome, retired Surrey Headmaster and Black Paper contributor, was reported thus: 'Mr Froome . . . says the report reiterates the views expressed in his book Why Tommy Isn't Learning and also his note of dissent to the Government-backed probe into reading standards . . . Said Mr Froome: "The sickness of our society stems from progressive education . . ." ' (Slough Evening Mail, 26.4.76). The ludicrous point here is not the content of Mr Froome's views, but the fact that within his report Bennett specifically repudiates any idea that his findings support the well-aired theses of Mr Froome, mentioning him by name. The substance of the matter is that Bennett found only a small minority of 'progressive' teachers, so Bennett's findings as a whole cannot possibly mean that progressive methods, whatever their faults, are responsible for the ills of society.
>
> (Chanan, 1976, p. 23)

4.10 Dr Rhodes Boyson's reactions were equally definitive. He suggested that Bennett's book 'should cause every parent to check what is being done at local schools. If they are filled with progressive rubbish they should demand from the headmaster and governors that they should return to traditional structured learning so that their children will have a fair chance' (*Times Educational Supplement*, 25 June 1976).

4.11 Yet Bennett's own views on the practical implications of his work were very different:

> It would be a pity, and misplaced, to use [the results] to fan the flames of controversy. The findings should be taken rather as a challenge to isolate for example those aspects of formal classrooms which are responsible for progress in the basic skills and to see how they could be incorporated into more informal settings, or to ponder how teaching can be arranged so that there is sufficient structure for the anxious, sufficient stimulation for the most able, and encouragement for the weaker pupils, so that learning is an enjoyable and rewarding experience for them all. Simplistic slogans will hardly help to answer such questions as these.
>
> (*Times Educational Supplement*, 30 April 1976)

4.12 Bennett's care in distinguishing his findings from what might be done about them is admirable, but he might be accused of being disingenuous, for he surely could have predicted how some people would react. He can hardly blame people for simplistic slogans if he provides them with the very words they use, for *Teaching Styles and Pupil Progress* recognizes only three kinds of teacher: formal, informal and mixed. Furthermore, if the programme he sets out in the quotation from the *Times Educational Supplement* above had been his original practical intention, he would have done a different research project. What responsibility has the researcher to consider how his work will be used when it is published?

4.13 Bennett's work is a good example of the way research has little direct impact on any key policy decisions but can change the climate of opinion. Despite Dr Boyson's recommendations, no-one actually sent out decrees from the DES or LEAs banning informal teaching, for the simple reason that policy in the English education system is not created in this way. As Unit 10 shows, ours is a relatively decentralized system in which much freedom of action is left to LEAs, schools and teachers. In special education the extent of devolution of decision-making is in some senses greater, since few special schools and units are subject to the centralized control of the exam system. Under these conditions, researchers have to work very hard to have an impact, because there are many more people to convince.

4.14 A study given less publicity, but with major practical implications, was the Haringey Reading Project (Tizard and Hewison, 1981). This work, funded by the DES and directed by the late Professor Jack Tizard, was carried out by Jenny Hewison and Bill Schofield. They looked at the effect on primary school children's reading performance of involving their parents in the children's work. Two Haringey primary schools sent

reading books home to the parents, who read with their children. Parents were also visited regularly and given help and advice. Children in these two schools were compared with two schools where children were given extra reading teaching at school. The researchers found a remarkable improvement in the reading abilities of the children whose parents were involved, to the extent that the scores on tests were lifted above the national average even though Haringey is an area where test scores are normally well below it. By comparison, the groups getting the extra reading teaching made only minimal improvements.

4.15 In summarizing her work in the *Times Educational Supplement*, Jenny Hewison spelt out the implications: 'it is clear that properly organized parental help can lead to quite striking improvements in children's reading performance . . . the project demonstrated that most parents are willing, as well as able, to help their children with reading at home. The families in the study lived in the kind of multi-ethnic inner-city area where poor school performance is often attributed to lack of parental interest: the study findings suggest that, at least as far as early reading is concerned, this explanation is both inadequate and unjust' (*Times Educational Supplement*, 16 January 1981). In a leader on the project, the *Times Educational Supplement* commented on the way remedial reading teaching in primary schools continued to make little difference and suggested that, if taken seriously, the Haringey Project 'could explode a whole area of primary practice'.

4.16 Two years on, the explosion has turned out to be a damp squib. Not only has the idea of systematic parental involvement not been taken up in other areas of the country, it has had only a modest effect on practice in Haringey. Julia Hagedorn (*Times Educational Supplement*, 11 March 1983) wrote that one of the two primary schools involved had built the idea into their work, but in the other it was continued 'in a slightly spasmodic fashion'. Some other Haringey schools had taken the idea up but, to the apparent chagrin of the Chief Education Officer, the LEA had not backed the scheme with money.

4.17 This failure to extend the work and implement it as policy in LEAs is even more ironic in view of the continual broadsides from government ministers about falling standards of literacy. It might have been expected that when a DES funded research project had come up with a scheme to increase reading standards at very little extra cost, the DES would have seized upon it eagerly. But in fact, the DES did not even extend the research funds to see if similar achievements could be made in other areas of the curriculum.

4.18 It is hard to attribute the failure to take up this research to poor dissemination if even schools in the same LEA have not changed their practice, although no doubt saturation coverage would have had its effects. This lack of interest may have to do with the fact that Jenny Hewison's results challenge too many hallowed practices, professional barriers and attitudes. One policy response to the research might be to reassign peripatetic remedial teachers to the role of home–school link workers, advising and supporting parents. How readily could this be done? And would many teachers be prepared to believe that the parents of inner-city children actually want to be involved in their children's education?

4.19 Research is only one factor in the creation of policy; there are many other expedients it must contend with or lie alongside, and many of these are much more immediate and pressing than a remote research study. In deciding what to do about the education of children with learning difficulties in ESN(M) schools, one authority has recently decided to develop its provision by opening a number of units in primary and secondary schools. But the main function of these units will be to allow the special schools to reduce their sizes to the numbers of pupils they were designed for. There is no suggestion that these numbers should be reduced any further. In taking its decision, the LEA referred to the Warnock Report and the 1981 Education Act, and members visited a neighbouring LEA to study its provision. They looked at how much money their LEA had tied up in special schools, and what capacity there was in ordinary schools. They also visited and consulted teachers in all the special schools in their own area, none of whom envisaged their schools closing down or reducing below design capacity. The LEA was aware of the research on units in ordinary schools but made no reference to it in its report, and we can safely say that the research played little part in the decision to open units in ordinary schools. It is no surprise, then, that this LEA did not translate Seamus Hegarty and Keith Pocklington's conclusions, quoted in para. 4.8 above, into practice.

4.20 Studies like Bennett's and Hegarty and Pocklington's are atypical because they have received a lot of publicity and been seen to have major practical implications. For the most part, educational research has little or no impact on day-to-day practice. Researchers and their sponsors worry about this much more than the consumers of research, who often have more immediate preoccupations. Two kinds of reason have been advanced to explain this. One is that the knowledge doesn't reach the people it should reach, the other is that most research is the wrong kind to be of practical help.

4.21 The first view has it that the reason research has so little impact is that it is inaccessible; research workers write for themselves, in arcane language, in obscure journals. And even if a practitioner can find his way to an academic library, he will have to work his way through a welter of statistics before he can make sense of what is being said. It has been suggested that researchers could write twice, once for themselves and once for teachers (Mittler, 1974). But if it is possible to write simply so that most people can understand, why is it necessary to write a more complicated version? If, on the other hand, the difficulty arises from the complexity of the ideas and the detail required to evaluate them, then surely the practitioner should not be asked to take things on trust but should be supplied with all the necessary information, however complex?

4.22 If you write something in learned language, people may be persuaded into thinking that it says more than if you write the same thing simply. Learned journals publish learned papers. How often will they publish a childishly simple exposition of a complex idea? As Peter Mittler (1982) points out, research reports are written in their own style both in the cause of science, and of promotion.

4.23 Many other means of dissemination of research have been suggested from time to time: we might have regular summaries of research distributed to LEAs; local conferences organized by researchers; or 'pyramid selling' by training educational psychologists centrally who would then spread the good news to teachers. The problem is that the news isn't always useful; often the reason research doesn't achieve very much is that it is the wrong kind of research. We can now look directly at this issue.

What research is useful?

Solving practical problems

4.24 Research is useful if it helps answer practical questions like: How can I make my English teaching more interesting? How can we reduce the amount of disruption in school? What is the best way to teach my children to read?

4.25 The information which research can provide is often misunderstood, and most often misunderstood by researchers. The canons of science dictate that one should aim to make statements which are laws, which are universally true. But there is an enormous limit on what can be said to be generally true in education. For example, the research reported in *Fifteen Thousand Hours* (see section 3) was conducted in ILEA comprehensive schools in the mid 1970s. In many ways ILEA is unusual, especially in being the highest spending authority in the country and in having the most ethnically diverse population. Would the results found in Rutter's work apply equally to rural Scotland? One criticism levelled at Neville Bennett's work was that it was conducted in LEAs without a strong tradition of progressive teaching: Lancashire and Cumbria. He might have reached very different conclusions in a county like Leicestershire, thought by many to be the best exponent of progressive education.

4.26 There is another, more important limit to the value of generalizations from research. Consider a statement like 'Children learn to read faster when taught by Method A than Method B'. Statements like this never mean that *all* children learn to read faster by Method A; rather they mean the average speed of learning to read by Method A was faster than the average speed under Method B. This allows for the possibility that some children learnt faster by Method B. What is true on the average is not what is true in all cases. How is a teacher to decide whether or not a generalization applies to a particular child or group of children? Decisions about teaching must be based primarily on a knowledge of the individual children. Research may be useful to the extent that teachers reading it can see similarities between their own circumstances and those described in

the research. Generalization of this kind is up to the reader of the research, and readers will draw different parallels between their own situations and what is described.

4.27 Looked at in this way, if the research is to be useful it has to offer a detailed and recognizable description of events. One of the shortcomings of much research on teaching has been its failure to describe the actual process of teaching.

4.28 When teaching is described in research, it is often done in such a way as to be difficult to recognize and reconstruct. One research tradition involves the observation of classroom events at regular time intervals (say every 10–20 seconds). What is observed at each interval is then classified into such headings as 'directs question at pupil' or 'gives feedback'. These methods produce numerical summaries of the frequency and sequences of events. They are useful for answering research questions such as 'Do teachers ask a lot of questions?' and 'Are some kinds of children rewarded more than others?'. These methods can also be used in teacher training to make teachers aware of their own behaviour. But they do not offer the kind of description of teaching which teachers can relate to their own practical purposes. This calls for a specific, qualitative description of events involving particular children, classrooms, teaching methods and subject matter.

Raising possibilities

4.29 Another way research can be useful is by stimulating people to think about possibilities that had not previously occurred to them. But people get their ideas from all kinds of sources: from books, films, magazines, hints from colleagues, disputes with parents and children, walks on a Sunday afternoon. Researchers have no monopoly on good ideas. One thing research can be very good at is collecting and making available examples of practice, to illuminate and stimulate ideas. This is the most important purpose of case studies, and it is one of the motives underlying the collection of case studies in this course.

Questioning assumptions and goals

4.30 One of the dangers of increasing bureaucratic control over research is that research can become a purely technical enterprise, whose job is to discover the most efficient way to reach predefined goals. But policy goals themselves are in need of close scrutiny. A great deal of educational research has gone into the development of valid and reliable examinations and of standardized assessments. This work is aimed at technical refinements of assessment in education. But at the same time, there is also a lot of research which has studied the effects of examinations on the education system, and it is generally acknowledged that the examination system has many deleterious consequences, none of which can be remedied by piecemeal technical improvements.

4.31 Research that examines the consequences of adopting certain policies or that questions the goals of policy is often illuminating. In Appendix 1 of Unit 14, Jean Barr shows the gap between the assumptions underlying a community preschool project about the desires and priorities of women in a poor community, and the reality of their difficulties and personal priorities.

Who should do research?

4.32 One of the implications of Sinha's and Wood's arguments in their Reader articles is that research should become more local and more under the control of practitioners. David Wood says that for classroom research to be useful, it must reflect the way teachers view their work. He still leaves the initiative with the researcher, to whom he continues to allow a considerable measure of autonomy and control. Others have gone further. MacDonald (1975) has argued that educational research should increasingly come under the control of schools, that researchers should only be allowed in if there is an obvious pay-off for the school, and that the conditions under which they will work should be very clearly stated in advance.

4.33 Such a state of affairs may send shivers down the spines of some researchers. One of us (W.S.) did some psychological research in special schools for severely mentally

handicapped children in the early 1970s. He found that schools and teachers were often willing to have lessons disturbed so that researchers could test children in small rooms and then dispatch them back to the classroom. There was no written agreement to make clear to teachers the purpose of the work or to provide them with the results. MacDonald was reacting against this undemocratic way of working, which may serve the interests of research but seldom of children and teachers.

4.34 Malcolm Parlett and Keith Pocklington (1983) have also suggested that research should be more under the control of practitioners, but they go further and argue that research on practice is most effective when it is done by practitioners themselves:

> We suggest that self-studies be instigated from *inside* the organisation and that its members collaborate in the design and execution of the study. Moreover, the whole definition, scope, and motivation for the study should not be in terms of 'inspection' and 'checking up on people' but more as an exercise in *taking stock and seeing how we are doing*. A perspective as radically distinct as possible from 'harsh managerial evaluation' holds out greater possibility, we believe, for creating conditions in which organisational and personal changes have the best chance of occurring . . .
>
> What are envisaged are studies that are locally conceived and managed, that highlight features of current practice and procedures, and that engage all the professional staff as contributors and co-investigators—as observers, rapporteurs, critics, analysts of problems, and as sources for innovative ideas for new procedures. Individuals have special outlooks and have derived knowledge from experience; these are central resources for self-study on the lines suggested here.
>
> One basic premise in what we put forward is that the person on the job knows most about how the job might be done better. They are often in the best position to make, or at least to propose, innovations and reforms. The individuals within the system are inevitably the ones with the most intimate knowledge of its working. Even if recommendations are submitted from an outside body, it is the insiders who ultimately decide which changes to put into effect and with what degree of enthusiasm. Making improvements rests in the end with new behaviour on the part of those engaged in the day-to-day practice—the professionals running an assessment centre, teaching in a special unit, or working with a particular child and his or her parents. To accept that professionals have this final say, as it were, is to reinforce the case for letting them review their own efforts, actions and assumptions, that together constitute their working practice.
>
> (Parlett and Pocklington, 1983)

4.35 But is it any more democratic to have research controlled by practitioners than by researchers, or does one set of interests simply replace another ? Parlett and Pocklington's recommendations arise from a study of professional practice in the assessment and placement of hearing-impaired children, carried out not by practitioners but by researchers. Their illuminating account of the way professionals form opinions is an outsider's view, and their belief that the professionals themselves could distance themselves from their day-to-day work to view it with objectivity must be in part an article of faith. A further limitation to their idea of professional self-study is their failure to consider the contribution of the clients' views. Surely, in understanding the effects of professional practice, one should consider how the subjects of practice—children and parents—feel they are affected. To hand the control of research from one group of people to another—from the researchers to the practitioners—is not necessarily to democratize research, but simply to replace one set of interests by another.

5 Conclusion

5.1 Unit 14 ended by examining the scope for reform in special education. However, it left the arguments on which the direction of reform might be based unanalysed. After all, one person's dream of educational utopia might be another's scholastic nightmare. In this unit we have examined the notion of progress in special education and the contribution that research might make in promoting or facilitating it.

5.2 We hope that this unit, and the course as a whole, will encourage you to do your own basic research. We have tried to show that research need not entail complicated statistical methods, indeed such methods often create as many problems as they solve. Basic research involves looking up statistics, getting hold of documents, keeping a diary, talking to people about their work and experience, and recording the results of your work. Its essential features are a critical, questioning attitude, and a readiness to examine and record what goes on around you. The course has been full of questions which you might ask and try to answer. A small sample of these is given below:

- What information are parents of children with special needs given about the assessment of their children?
- How are resources for remedial education allocated in your school or a school you are familiar with, and in your area or LEA?
- What do your LEA's policy documents on special education say?
- What do local disabled and handicapped people want?
- What happens at your local Child Development Unit?
- How has special education changed over the years?
- What do parents feel about their children's education, and their own involvement in it?
- What do local teachers think of the local educational psychologists? What do local educational psychologists think of the teachers?
- What is the curriculum in a local special school? How does it compare with a local ordinary school curriculum?

5.3 But there are two points above all others we hope you will remember from this unit. First, that no amount of research can tell you what you should do. Any set of facts about education can always be used to justify more than one direction of practice. Second, that any decision you take should be your own, not ours. How would *you* make progress?

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This text forms part of an Open University course, E241 *Special Needs in Education*. The complete list of units in the course appears below.

Unit 1/2 Special biographies	Unit 10 National perspectives
Unit 3 Family views	Unit 11 Biology and handicap
Unit 4 Education for adult life?	Unit 12 Psychology and special education
Unit 5/6 A special curriculum?	Unit 13 Handicap is social
Unit 7 The professionals	Unit 14 Eradicating handicap
Unit 8 The powers that be	Unit 15 Research and progress in special education
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